

Did Mme. Nhu Know? Was It CIA Plot?

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WASHINGTON Among the questions still unanswered after the military takeover in South Viet Nam:

WAS MADAME Ngo Dinh Nhu's world tour designed as an escape from the overthrow he knew was inevitable?

AND HOW MUCH of a hand did the Central Intelligence Agency take in the ouster of her brother-in-law Ngo Dinh Diem's government?

No reliable answer to either question likely will ever be forthcoming, but speculation in Washington is under way.

Three of Madame Nhu's children are unaccounted for in the Saigon uprising, as far as the U.S. State Department and the Vietnamese embassy here knew Saturday.

Although Madame Nhu's beautiful teenage daughter Le Thi is with her in California, her three younger children — two boys and another girl — reportedly were still somewhere in Viet Nam.

"We have no word on them," a spokesman for the Vietnamese embassy said Saturday. "We understand they probably are still in Saigon."

If true, this complicates the neat theory of critics of Viet Nam's Dragon Lady who see her prolonged visit in the U.S. as an escape act. Even the madame's worst critics are reluctant to believe she would be so callous as to knowingly abandon three of her children to the fates of rebellion.

"We are mystified about that," the U.S. State Department's Abraham Manell of the Far East desk noted when asked the whereabouts of the other Nhu children.

There is a suspicion that the children may be somewhere in China or Hong Kong. 10 days ago Madame Nhu said in an interview they were being cared for in Saigon.

The CIA, it is being both blamed and credited for the episode, is tied to the ouster and apparent death of Diem by its late husband's strong-man husband, Ngo Dinh Nhu.

The CIA has the problem of how to convince the world that it had nothing to do with the overthrow, yet snare enough off-the-record credit to impress its critics in Congress.

Just three years ago, several senators were demanding that Congress be told more about what the CIA was up to.

Sen. Albert Gruening (D., Alaska) and Wayne Morse (D., Ore.) teamed up in an attack on the CIA. They urged support

of Florida Sen. George Smathers' resolution that a watchdog committee be appointed to check on the CIA's activities.

"While it is supposed to be a fact-finding agency," Gruening said, "in which role it has been notably unsuccessful, as in Cuba and now Honduras, it is far more than that. It is also an undercover cloak-and-dagger operation, making its own policies, following its own bent, subject to no control by the Congress."

But the CIA seemingly doesn't intend to let Congress in on its secrets.

The most embarrassed people in Washington today are the seven legislators who got back from Viet Nam this week just in time to say nothing was likely to happen to the Diem government for a long time.